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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA964, NICARAGUAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS WARN CHOICE IS

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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 07MANAGUA964 | 2007-04-17 18:56 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN | Embassy Managua |

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9834

INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1060

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2017

TAGS: KDEM KWMN PDEM PHUM PREL NU

SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS WARN CHOICE IS DEMOCRACY OR AUTHORITARIANISM, NOT PARTIES

REF: A. MANAGUA 06 02599

1B. MANAGUA 07 00463

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C). SUMMARY: Leading members of the Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua recently met with Embassy officers to discuss the need to encourage women within civil society to defend Nicaragua's democracy, promote development, and stop the slide toward authoritarianism and "legal dictatorship" they fear is underway in their country. These women worry that unless civil society acts now, Nicaragua will replicate Chavez's Venezuelan model. Although the movement first emerged in protest against the Somoza regime and its ideological roots lie with the revolutionary Sandinistas, the organization's disillusionment with Daniel Ortega started in the mid-1980s. Lamenting the lack of a strong opposition party on either the right or the left, these women are seeking to move beyond the traditional, anachronistic party structures that have perpetuated caudillo-style government and encourage an alliance across the political spectrum based on human rights, equality, freedom, and justice. Self-proclaimed feminists, they are leading the charge to debunk the FSLN mystique, particularly among the European left. They termed the encounter with U.S. Embassy representatives "historic," as it was the first time they had experienced this type of dialogue with the U.S. government.

END SUMMARY

Historic Encounter

12. (C) At an informal gathering at the home of PolCouns on April 12, Sofia Montenegro, president of the Nicaragua's Women's Autonomous Movement (MAM) and a journalist by profession, delivered a frank and compelling history and evolution of the women's movement and the fight for gender equality during and after the war of the 1980s. Before launching into her story, she remarked that this meeting was "historic," as it was the first time in at least 25 years that government representatives from the "most powerful country on the planet" had met with this segment of the Nicaraguan women's movement. MAM started as an anti-Somoza group of 25 members in alliance with the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN), and then mushroomed into a movement during the civil war period.

13. (C) Relations with the FSLN began to sour in 1984 when

it became apparent that the Sandinistas were neither truly supportive of their cause nor their call for gender equality.

Montenegro explained that the FSLN under Daniel Ortega defined women as members of three limited, "non-intellectual" categories: peasant (campesina), laborer (obradora), and pobladora (settler)--anyone else represented the "dreaded bourgeoisie." Relations deteriorated further in 1986, but rather than sever ties with the Sandinistas, the group fought for and won an equal rights provision in the 1987 constitution. Again, just before the elections in 1990, MAM worked past differences within the FSLN, and agreed to a truce in exchange for Ortega's commitment to increased female political participation, including a 50-50 split in power sharing.

¶4. (C) When Ortega lost the 1990 election to opposition leader Violeta Chamorro, he and his cohorts reneged on their promise to the women's movement. The organization broke from the FSLN and aligned with the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS). Although the period of political transition under Chamorro represented a shift toward conservatism and a return to greater influence of the Catholic Church, Montenegro dubbed it the "spring time" for women's rights compared to subsequent periods. She explained the situation for women's rights worsened under Arnoldo Aleman's presidency, who allegedly under pressure from the Catholic Church, persecuted the women's movement and portrayed them as feminist "man eaters." During the Bolanos years the women's movement was essentially ignored. The movement currently remains allied with the MRS, but had there been a second round in the November 2006 presidential election, Montenegro contended she along with the others would have voted for Eduardo Montealegre of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) to prevent an Ortega victory. MAM regards the victory of the FSLN in 2006 as the "worst possible scenario" for women.

¶5. (C) Despite difficult experiences she endured over the years and her disillusion with the political class, Montenegro never left Nicaragua. She emphasized to us that under this Ortega government, she feels like an "exile" in her country for the first time in her life. Nevertheless, her long-term dream is to create a women's political party in Nicaragua.

Jurassic Park Politics

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¶6. (C) Montenegro lamented the absence of a viable opposition in the Nicaraguan political scene, and is convinced that it is up to civil society to create an alternative to stop Ortega from following the Chavez path to a "legalized dictatorship." While she recognized Eduardo Montealegre as a "contender in a field of limited choices," she opined that he is "not really fit for the job." That said, he would have been preferable to Ortega, and many MRS voters would also have voted against Ortega in a run-off. In her view, the Liberals represent greed and an obsession with money, self-interest, and patronage, while the FSLN is an even more dangerous breed that seeks to maintain total control, secrecy, and power at the cost of freedom, rule of law, and human rights. Neither option will help resolve Nicaragua's fundamental problems. According to Montenegro, both the liberals and socialists hail from a "Jurassic Park" of politics, fossils lodged in the past, out of touch and ill-equipped to deal with the realities or needs of the present. While the Sandinistas are more disciplined, to their advantage, Liberals tend to "cannibalize" themselves.

¶7. (C) MAM leaders agreed that Nicaraguans must choose between democracy and authoritarianism and that democratic-minded parties need to overcome their differences and work with civil society to counter the non-democratic forces taking root. The women discussed the possibility of forging an ALN-MRS alliance that would focus on the common ground of democracy, while avoiding areas of contention. (Comment: Unlike the situation of Venezuela, where the opposition and civil society woke up late in the game, the prospects for Nicaragua may be more promising. As the

actions of this group of women demonstrate, the FSLN does not have a lock on the left. Nicaraguan women's groups who wave the banner of freedom, justice, and equality, could mobilize forces to preserve a democratic government and play a pivotal role in the municipal elections in 2008. End Comment.)

Anti-Ortega Offensive

¶8. (C) MAM members attending the meeting were instrumental in helping Zoilamerica Narvaez (Reftel A.) denounce her step-father Daniel Ortega for years of sexual abuse and harassment in the Nicaraguan courts, and are continuing to support her in bringing her case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The organization has actively spoken out against Ortega and his supporters who have "looked the other way" with regard to the Zoilamerica case. In the run-up to the November 2006 presidential election, MAM, along with other women's organizations under the alliance of the Women's Network Against Violence, issued a statement condemning Ortega and other FSLN party members whom they also accused of sexual abuse, warning voters that their election would enable a climate of impunity and societal tolerance of intrafamiliar abuse of women and girls.

Originally planning to declare open opposition to Ortega on Inauguration Day in January, they decided to wait until March 8, International Women's Day, to mount an offensive with a full page declaration accusing the government of operating a new clandestine regime disguised as "Direct Democracy."

¶9. (C) The MAM's harshly worded manifesto denounced the man who ascended to the presidency with a minority of the vote by means of the Liberal-Sandinista pact as a symbol of sexual abuse, male impunity, and a "veritable affront to national dignity." Further, the declaration accused First Lady Rosario Murillo of selling out her daughter in exchange for political gain. It judged the triumph of the FSLN "the worst possible scenario" for women, and dismissed the government's promise to establish a gender quota as a "grotesque" gesture to women. Likening Murillo's position to that of "consort," the statement voiced indignation that "no one, not even a minority of FSLN voters had chosen (Murillo) to assume a de

facto presidency." The statement held that neither the votes received, nor the "pseudo-revolutionary and pseudo-religious rhetoric," nor a sense of cynicism could hide such a mockery.

MAM also organized a protest on International Women's Day, pointedly selecting as their venue the monument to journalists to emphasize freedom of expression. Montenegro opined that the International Women's Day protests prompted First Lady Rosario Murillo to cancel a government rally she had planned for the same day.

Feminists Debunk FSLN Mystique before Stalwart Euro Left

¶10. (C) Unapologetic feminists, the women of MAM nonetheless expressed frustration with international leftist groups and political parties who continue to support Ortega, seemingly blind to his record of human rights and sexual abuses. Although they receive much of their support from European leftist and socialist NGOs and political parties, MAM finds the groups to be naive when it comes to the Sandinistas and errant in their willingness to give money directly to the Nicaraguan government rather than to civil society. To counter the FSLN revolutionary mystique, the organization has launched an international outreach campaign aimed primarily at left-leaning organizations in Europe and the United States, as well as to influence public opinion and raise awareness of the "dark side" of the Ortega government. One MAM member, Violeta Delgado, recently returned from a tour of Germany where she met with women's solidarity groups, Social Democrats, and other left-leaning parties in 15 cities to speak the truth about Ortega. She reported some success, although she was thrown out of one meeting.

¶11. (C) MAM considers Spain a positive role model for the

women's movement and plans to travel to the province of Andalucia to deliver the same message and garner international support. Lauding Andalucia as a model of success for linking empowerment of women to development, Montenegro mused that this region of Spain has transformed from one of the poorest areas of Europe to one of the most prosperous in just 25 years. The group also intends to expand its information campaign to the United States. They are particularly interested in any assistance we can provide to link them to women's organizations and think tanks to help strengthen their institution and build capacity.

Mounting a May Day Blitzkrieg

¶12. (C) Looking ahead to May 1 as another opportunity to unite in protest, MAM met with such organizations as the NGO Movimiento por Nicaragua, the Conservative Party, ALN, MRS, union leaders, and teachers to forge a common strategy. All agreed that the day's focus should reach beyond the standard labor themes of workers rights and higher wages and encompass the broader goal of preserving democracy. They are working on a "blitzkrieg" approach to organize multiple smaller gatherings throughout the country, while seeking private sector support to buttress their efforts. They also will enlist media coverage, and plan to issue another proclamation against the Ortega government.

Red Alerts

¶13. (C) Three MAM members, Jamileth Mejia, Juanita Jimenez, and Violeta Delgado, also belong to the NGO Network of Women against Violence, an umbrella group encompassing women's organizations across ideological lines. They warned us that as part of its modus operandi, the FSLN is attempting to infiltrate the Network. As Sofia Montenegro explained, the FSLN strategy is to penetrate, divide, and attack. As a result of their efforts to gain access to the Network, the FSLN is sowing mistrust and discord among Network members. The ability to instill fear and intimidate, they worry, could weaken the Network. Therefore, the women prefer to work with us from their position within the uncompromised MAM. Reiterating concerns about Chavez's influence, they reported that Venezuela plans to name a women beholden to Chavez to a seat on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHRC). In contrast to a similar decision by Evo Morales of Bolivia, who named an accomplished woman with responsible feminist credentials to the IAHRC, they regard Chavez's pick as a cynical move, and part of a strategy to protect Ortega's hide on three contentious issues: the ongoing case of

Zoilamerica, the human rights case of the Miskito Indians, and the Nicaraguan government's decision to criminalize therapeutic abortion.

¶14. (C) Participants:

U.S.

Victoria Alvarado, Political Counselor
Irene Marr, Political Officer
Nicole Chulick, INL Coordinator, Political Officer
Darla Jordan, Public Diplomacy Officer
Isa Laporte, FSN Political Section
Danika Walters, USAID
Deborah Ulmer, National Democratic Institute

Nicaragua

Sofia Montenegro, Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua
Jamileth Mejia, Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua and Network of Women Against Violence
Juanita Jimenez, Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua and Network of Women Against Violence
Violeta Delgado, Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua and Network of Women Against Violence
Patricia Orozco, Women's Autonomous Movement of Nicaragua

Comment

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¶115. (C) We believe that Post's longstanding support for Zoilamerica and its decision to present her with the "women of courage award" on International Women's Day (Reftel B.), along with our efforts to foster dialogues and networking with women across party lines, created an opening of trust with the leadership of the Women's Autonomous Movement. This connection offers the potential to help forge alliances with female civil society actors, the media, private sector, and NGOs. Such alliances will be critical to keeping pressure on the political parties and National Assembly leaders to maintain a check on the Ortega government's autocratic and undemocratic tendencies. It is essential to encourage these forces for change and to create spaces for women to have their voices heard in a context that will reach society at large.

TRIVELLI